



PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
7TH FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0380

LANA C. SEIVERS, Ed.D.
COMMISSIONER

Date: September 15, 2006

Subject: Response to Intervention

To: Tennessee Special Education Supervisors

From: Joseph Fisher, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Special Education

By now you are aware that IDEA 2004 included legislation on a process called Response to Intervention (RTI). The emphasis of this new law is to focus on providing high quality research-based interventions within the general education prior to special education referral. These early intervening services allow students who are struggling with instruction to receive supports earlier in their learning career than the traditional methods of referral for special education services.

The Division of Special Education will convene a state task force of stakeholders this fall to develop RTI guidelines and recommendations for districts. The Division requests that you contact Dr. Kathy Strunk, 615.532.1659, or Kathy.Strunk@state.tn.us, if you plan to implement RTI processes in your district this year. The law states that 15% of special education funds may be used for early intervening services. Schools that designate funds for early intervening must have a specific plan for how this will be accomplished.

We wish to emphasize that implementation of an RTI model should be broken down into manageable components. Because RTI is about systems change and major infrastructural change, a complete RTI model will probably not be fully implemented for 2, 3, or even 4 years. Suggested steps toward implementation are provided at the end of this letter.

The RTI model shares many commonalities with the 3-tier reading model used in Tennessee's Reading First schools and recommended in the Tennessee State Board of Education Reading Policy (Tennessee State Board of Education, Reading, 3.104, 2005). The state department is embracing the RTI initiative as a wonderful opportunity to align with the recommendations of the State Board and the efforts of Reading First to improve teaching and learning for both general and special education students. These models require fundamental changes in the school day and changes in the way resources are used. We believe these changes will benefit all students. However, in order to implement the model, careful study and collaboration among stakeholders (e.g., special education, general education, higher education, state, and local school personnel) is necessary to ensure Tennessee's successful implementation of RTI. Because of this,

we hold a sense of excitement about RTI, but the Division of Special Education will proceed with care as it works to interpret the federal law and rules and regulations.

Remember that RTI is optional as a determinant of LD identification. More than anything, RTI is an effective instructional model. RTI *processes* must be in place before a student may be identified as LD by using an RTI model. As we move forward with the RTI initiative, it makes sense that we continue to always consider the best interests of our students first.

The Division of Special Education's State Improvement Grant has partnered with The IRIS Center, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, to develop online modules that provide professional development on RTI. Three of these modules, RTI Overview, RTI Assessment, and RTI Reading are now free and available to all (<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>). One more module on RTI, Putting RTI All Together, will be available in October 2006. We encourage everyone to get started learning about the modules and their content. The IRIS Center modules will assist with RTI professional development and guide school personnel who plan to initiate RTI.

During the next school year, the IRIS Center will again work with us in the development of two modules, one for school administrators on how to build an infrastructure for RTI and one that provides a description of the RTI model's Tier 3.

Finally, we again want to mention that we are enclosing a table of suggestions for districts considering RTI professional development for the upcoming school year. If you have questions or comments call Dr. Kathy Strunk at 615-532-1659 or e-mail Kathy.Strunk@state.tn.us. She will also be able to identify RTI trainers who may be able to assist you.

Thank you for all you do for our students. I look forward to working with you on our Response to Intervention initiative.

cc: Kathy Strunk, Director, State Improvement Grant and RTI, Division of Special Education